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AUTHOR Klinman, Debra G.
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ABSTRACT

In September of 1981, the Fatherhood Project at Bank Street College in New York City began field research investigating the ways in which America's major social institutions were responding to the call for greater male involvement in childrearing. The research effort attempted to identify innovations in five major institutional sectors: the law, employment, family health care, social and supportive services, and education. Nearly 400 examples of innovative programs or policies were identified. Key personnel responsible for the programs received a written questionnaire; many were also interviewed by telephone. Model programs were selected for site visits by project staff, who collected observational data and conducted in-depth interviews with service providers and users. The discussion in this report focuses on what the project learned about innovations in the process of formal education and specifically describes work done at four levels of the formal educational process: preschool, elementary, high school, and college. At every level, innovative educational programs were found; among others, these included programs designed to introduce men into preschool classrooms and to develop nurturant behaviors in male elementary school students. Programs were also identified that provided "hands on" child care experiences as part of a preparenthood curriculum for teenagers and that offered college courses centered on the study of fatherhood. (RH)

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EDUCATION FOR FATHERHOOD
DEVELOPING THE NURTURING POTENTIAL OF BOYS AND MEN

Debra G. Klinman
Bank Street College of Education

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Introduction

Analyses from a variety of disciplines--psychology, sociology, cultural history--increasingly agree that an expanded male role in childrearing is critical to the realization of women's equal opportunity and to the full psychological development of children, women, and men themselves. In spite of this growing awareness of the importance of the father's role, strategies for achieving greater male participation in the daily tasks of parenting remain largely problematic. Certainly, individual families have forged their own solutions; but for change to occur on a larger scale, the major institutions which surround family life must also play a role.

The Fatherhood Project, at Bank Street College in New York City, represents the first systematic, national attempt to investigate the ways in which America's major social institutions are responding to the call for greater male involvement in childrearing. In September, 1981, the project began an extensive agenda of field research to identify innovations in five major institutional sectors: the law, employment, family health care, social and supportive services, and education. The field research raised a number of questions: Who is responsible for these innovations and what strategies do they use? What are

the resistances to change and how are they overcome? Who takes advantage of such institutional options and what are the effects of their participation? Finally, what contributes to the success of certain innovations, and how might they be replicated?

Answers came from a variety of sources. Nearly 400 examples of innovative programs or policies were identified around the country. Key personnel responsible for these efforts received a written questionnaire; many were also interviewed by telephone. Finally, a set of "model" programs were selected for site visits by project staff, who collected observational data and conducted indepth interviews with service providers and service users.

This paper will focus exclusively on what the project has learned about innovations in the process of formal education. Arguably, no other institutional arena--except, of course, the family-- presents so early or so sustained an opportunity to influence the development of social norms about what is considered gender-appropriate behavior. During the last decade, many educators have worked to overcome sex role stereotypes, primarily because of the limits they place on the career aspirations of girls and women; however, little or no attention has been paid to the complementary task of educating boys and men about their capacity to nurture. This paper will present a critical analysis of those efforts which do exist, and make recommendations for further change.

Two comments about the scope of the educational process are in order from the outset. First, it has long been recognized that the experience of schooling occurs on two distinct levels: that

of the explicit or "official" curriculum, and that of the implicit or "hidden" curriculum. The messages conveyed at each level are by no means always congruent, and it is usually the sub-rosa context of the hidden curriculum which is the more powerful communicator of social rules--even though most attempts to achieve educational equity are initiated at the more readily discerned official level. Not surprisingly, most of the innovations this paper will describe represent attempts to alter the official messages of the classroom--by introducing new images of or experiences with nurturing men--but they fall short of grappling with powerful hidden-level messages--social expectations, attitudes, and rewards which operate to maintain the status quo.

Secondly, it is important to note that education in this country is by no means a monolithic phenomenon. Its scope includes formal and informal settings, public and private institutions, and learning opportunities which literally span the life cycle. Given this enormous scope, the potential for change is also enormous. But, especially in the arena of formal public education, change can be particularly slow. Every school district maintains some autonomy just as every teacher creates a unique learning environment, shaped as much by individual teaching style as by official regulations or prescribed curricula. Therefore, it would be naive to assert that the innovations described in this paper can be taken from any one setting and transplanted, whole, to any other.

Nonetheless, in the belief that some of the strategies used by innovative educators to increase the competence, confidence, and comfort of boys and men in childcare roles can be instructive, this paper will describe the work being done at four levels of the formal educational process: preschool, the elementary grades, high school, and college.

The Preschool Years: Encountering the Caring Man

Preschool enrollment introduces the young child to a new social world--one that is organized by the teacher, and populated by the child's first large and consistent group of peers. While there is some limited evidence (mostly from research on Head Start) that preschool attendance can improve school performance and academic achievement, the most outstanding and repeatedly documented effects of early schooling are in the social domain: the child's sociability, self-expression, independence, initiative, curiosity, and social adaptability may all be enhanced.

The preschool environment remains a largely alien place for most adult males. That women structure the typical early childhood classroom is a product of history and social convention. While there is no evidence to suggest that the prevalence of female teachers is detrimental, young children learn a great deal from observation--and what they see in the typical preschool classroom tells them that only women know how to take care of the young.

To overcome this message, educators (often with the support

of parents) have tried to recruit more male preschool teachers. In fact, enthusiasm for this straightforward idea has been strong for a number of years; nor has it waned in the face of research evidence that men and women are more alike than unalike once they assume the responsibilities of the teaching role (see, for example, the review of this topic by Gold & Reis, 1980). Nonetheless, there are several practical barriers--such as low prestige and salary--which continue to limit the entry of men into this traditionally female career. Even though more men are becoming early childhood educators--and, incidentally, more women are leaving the field--the trend is a slow one.

As a practical alternative, some innovative preschools are trying to attract a more plentiful--and previously untapped--supply of caring adult men: fathers (or uncles, grandfathers, big brothers, male friends of the family, and so forth). Because many men find it difficult to take the first step into the classroom without some support and encouragement, special programs just for dads have been initiated in settings as varied as a Quaker-run child care center in Wahington, D.C., a public elementary school in rural Orient, Iowa, a parent cooperative outside of New York City, and a multi-site program in school districts scattered across the state of Minnesota.

These innovations share some characteristics that help ensure their success. First, they are scheduled to allow for the work commitments of most fathers: weekday evenings and Saturday mornings are popular times. Secondly, each male visitor is made to feel welcome in the classroom; the day is arranged so that the

fathers can become familiar with typical classroom activities, even leading the children through activitites in which they have a special interest or skill. Thirdly, the visit is designed to introduce the men to the educators who regularly work with their children--teachers, counselors, administrators--so they won't be dealing with unfamiliar "authorities" the next time they call the school with a question or concern.

In relatively rare instances, educators have added to these basics in ways that are worth noting. Special one-day events for fathers are just that in the eyes of children--special, out of the ordinary. Extending the presence of caring males in the early childhood classroom can be accomplished through simple alterations in the daily curriculum: introducing children to storybooks about male caregivers, or encouraging them to write, paint, and talk about the men in their lives. This must be accomplished, of course, with considerable sensitivity for the sake of youngsters who live in families without fathers.

Still, the majority of preschool-based innovations fail to achieve regular, ongoing father involvement for the simple reason that they take only the perspective of the child, ignoring the need of men to establish meaningful connections with one another. Programs that faciltate mutual support among the fathers of young children are somewhat more plentiful in the relatively informal domain of parent education--in settings like the neighborhood "Y" or community recreation center. One outstanding example of how this can be achieved in a school setting is provided by the father-child play-and-discussion component of Minnesota's three

dozen Early Childhood and Family Education programs; it is a model which merits replication.

The Middle Years: Learning to Take Care of Babies

During the middle years of childhood--roughly the period between six and twelve years of age--the elementary school is so pervasive an influence that it rivals the family as the central context for understanding child development. During these years, the preschool's emphasis on social skills gives way to the acquisition and mastery of academic skills.

The key to influencing how children think about themselves is to present them with opportunities to try out new behaviors, to learn by doing. Therefore, successful attempts by elementary schools to encourage the development of male nurturance are those which provide their male students with "hands on" experience in childcare techniques.

While this innovation remains a relatively rare one, it has been tried with great success in private schools in metropolitan New York, Philadelphia, and in Durham, NC. Certain program characteristics seem important. First, such courses are offered only to youngsters who are towards the upper end of the middle-years age range, when the ability to take the social perspective of the other--an important part of understanding and responding to the cues of an infant--is already fairly well developed. Successful programs usually have ready access to a reliable supply of babies, and to a child care environment that is safe and well equipped; some formal affiliation with a day care

center is optimal.

Interestingly, even though these programs may vary in other ways, they tend to be initiated and taught by women, not men. A common concern is that boys will be reluctant to take advantage of such courses, or will be intimidated by their female classmates in coeducational schools. To the contrary, when educators are careful to set a tone that acknowledges the needs of young males, they enjoy the experience fully and learn a great deal about themselves as caregivers along the way.

Successful programs reserve as many spaces for boys as for girls, and then introduce some male role models into the classroom, to help balance the prevalence of women as teachers. For example, one school invites a fulltime homemaker father to class, another arranges for a male firefighter to talk about first aid and a male pediatrician to discuss common childhood illnesses. Again, all of this can be supplemented by the careful choice of curriculum materials that stress male involvement with young children.

Even though these programs are deliberately experiential in nature, most teachers save at least some class time for more didactic modes of instruction as well: group discussion, journal writing, watching films about child development, and using observational tools to enhance the ability to interpret nonverbal cues. Still, the greatest proportion of class time is used for direct interaction with the babies. Students learn about everything from playtime to diapering, often working in pairs to provide mutual support. Capitalizing on the importance of mastery

to the middle years child, most programs award certificates of accomplishment to their young participants--who often use their new credential to establish credibility as babysitters.

Perhaps the major shortcoming of this middle years innovation is that it simply does not reach a large enough student audience. It is usually offered as an after-hours elective and only to students in private schools. Those who sign up are self-selected and probably predisposed to nontraditional attitudes about the ability of boys (like themselves) to take care of babies. Clearly, the small group of students who have access to this innovation are unlike the large majority of school aged children in a number of ways.

The Teenage Years: Preparation for Parenthood

Adolescence--the few short years that separate childhood from young adulthood in this culture--has long been recognized as a critical period of development. Teenagers face a number of challenges: achieving independence from the family of origin, adjusting to the rapid onslaught of physical changes that signal sexual maturation, establishing peer relationships, grappling with the pressing questions of identity, and making educational preparations to select and enter an adult vocation.

For most adolescents, the possibilty of becoming parents seems far away and relatively unimportant, even though many family life educators contend that parenthood is universally the most predictable career of any student's life. While most teenage boys feel a strong press to make "appropriate" job

choices, the schools do relatively little to help them think about parenthood as a vocation requiring careful preparation.

Traditionally, classes that prepare teenagers for parenting, family life, or childcare professions have been the province of home economics--which in turn, has long been the domain of women, both as students and as teachers. Although there has been some recent progress in increasing the male enrollment in such classes, many hidden-level messages still operate to exclude young males.

One pre-parenthood curriculum ("Exploring Childhood," developed under the auspices of federal funding by the Education Development Center ,Newton, MA) combines didactic instruction with "hands on" child care experience. Although it is in use in thousands of junior and senior high schools across the country, the male:female enrollment ratio remains disappointing. One recent evaluation of the program's effectiveness in three north central states makes the point that although boys remain unlikely participants, they may actually have the most to gain from the experience. "The study suggests the intriguing possibilty that students who have little previous experience with children--especially boys--stand to benefit the most from parenting courses with fieldwork components. Educators need to find ways to convince boys that parent education is an equal opportunity enterprise (Mokros, 1982)."

There is another group of teenage boys who deserve mention, those for whom the possibility of parenthood has already become a problem-laden reality. Although alternative school programs for

adolescent mothers are increasingly common, the teenage father has been largely ignored, even spurned. The awareness that the adolescent father may be able, with some support and encouragement, to make important contributions to the developmental well being of his child is so recent that a great deal remains unknown: What kinds of educational programs are most likely to succeed, and with which young men? The recently launched multi-site Teen Father Collaboration, coordinated by Bank Street College, will examine these issues. Among the collaboration's several service delivery sites is a public school district in Louisville, KY; research conducted in this setting will guide the development of program models for other schools around the country.

Colleges and Universitites: The Study of Fatherhood

Traditionally, more men than women enroll in the nation's colleges and universitites, and this enrollment gap has not narrowed appreciably during the last decade. Nontheless, although in the minority, women are not willing to have their academic needs and contributions overlooked, as evidenced by the emegence of Women's Studies during the seventies. There has been considerably less fervor generated by men who want a forum for examining the ways in which social expectations influence their lives--although there are courses that examine the changing male role in about two dozen institutions of higher learning around the country.

As a special subset of such courses, there are at least a

few examples of college classes that focus specifically on the relationship between men and and children--the bona fide "study of fatherhood." Such courses are offered, for example, to students of psychology at the University of Massachussetts and at the New School for Social Research, to early childhood education majors at Los Medanos Community College in CA, and to home economics students at the University of Akron.

Almost invariably, such courses are taught by men, although they are attended by students of both sexes. In a few cases, they are offered for full college credit; more typically, they are non-credit electives. Course content is frequently a combination of academic readings and group discussion--not unlike any seminar. Fieldwork components, like visits to a neonatal nursery or a family day care center, are also popular.

Enrollment in such courses can be a problem, especially since college courses are expected to attract enough student tuition fees to offset costs. In particular, young men who are not yet fathers hesitate to sign up--because of disinterest, homophobia or a reluctance to undertake self-examination.

One model, with a venerable and successful history, is just for men who already <u>are</u> fathers. Offered at colleges and universities throughout the state of Washington, this program brings fathers and their children together for a combination of experiential learning, professional guidance, and peer support. Although this model has been widely adapted by parent educators in informal instructional settings, its replication in

institutions of higher education is surprisingly rare.

Summary and Recomendations

American education has recently come under attack from a number of directions; in the uproar, it may be easy to dismiss the nascent interest in educational options that encourage male nurturance. Still, as the society continues to move in the direction of sex equity, the way in which we educate our children will directly influence the rate and pervasiveness of change.

Innovative programs designed to enhance the competence and self-confidence of males as caregivers have already been introduced at every step of the formal educational process; it has been the goal of The Fatherhood project to identify and describe them. At least three "next steps" are now in order.

First, educational researchers should untertake the task of program evaluation, since--with few exceptions--information about program effects is anecdotal and informal. Secondly, educators should turn their attention to the hidden curriculum, and develop strategies for overcoming the social expectations and reward systems which operate within the school setting to maintain outmoded stereotypes about male behavior. Finally, since the success and durability of every innovation ultimately depends on adequate funding--especially in the domain of public education--there must be a clear financial commitment to support educational initiatives which encourage the devlopment of male nurturance--for the ultimate benefit of children, women, and men themselves.